

NRCS Alabama

Current Developments



January 2005

From The State Conservationist - *Robert N. Jones*

Happy New Year to each of you! I trust that you enjoyed the holiday season with your family and friends. I certainly did. Since both Kit's mother and my mother live in west Tennessee, we spend a lot of time on the road traveling from Auburn to the Memphis area to be with our families. While it takes a few hours to make this journey, it's a relatively easy trip. That's possible because in the past many folks have worked hard to build good road systems.

I'm reminded that in the conservation arena, the same principle is true. We have made great strides in the 70 years or so that our agency has been in existence.

As employees of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), we have

provided information and technical assistance so that landowners throughout the years could pave the way to conserve and protect our natural resources. The job is not done, however; our challenges may be a little different. Not only are we still concerned about conserving our natural resources, an area of emphasis now is preserving the land for agricultural use. The talents and special skills of our employees are still very important to building a better Alabama. Thank you for what you have done in the past and for the contributions that you will make in 2005.

Bob

Cullman County SWCD Supervisor Elected State AACD President

Grover Reeves, supervisor of the Cullman County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was elected President of the Alabama Association of Conservation District (AACD) Supervisors.

Grover lives in the Vinemont Community of Cullman County and has been active in the conservation arena both as a professional and volunteer. He was recognized as a Conservation Tillage Pioneer for his work with Chevron Chemical Company. Chevron provided the first chemicals used in no-till farming and Grover worked to get the system adopted by farmers across the south.

Grover directs an active Practices and Research (P&R) Committee (one of the AACD Standing Committees) and has focused a lot of attention on the control of invasive plant species.

Grover has received many service awards for community leadership and was honored by *The Cullman Times* as an unsung hero.

Congratulations to Grover. We know the Association will be in good hands under his proven leadership.



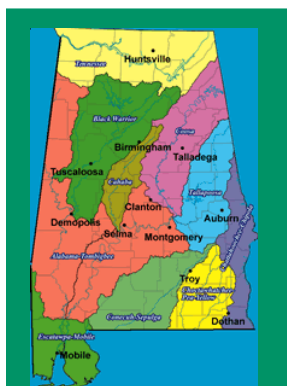
Clean Water in Alabama

Watershed Partnership–Taking Action for Clean Water

By Allison Newell Jenkins, Coordinator, Alabama Clean Water Partnership

Information to help Alabamians learn about watersheds and how to better protect Alabama's rivers, lakes, and wetlands is on two Alabama television "Watershed" websites. These sites stress the action individuals and communities need to take to be "watershed wise" and prevent storm water pollution.

This information is available thanks to a partnership with the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM), the Alabama Clean Water Partnership (ACWP), and the cooperative stations' Storm Center Communications.



Major watersheds in Alabama

The "Watershed Project" was kicked off in the Mobile and Montgomery areas. Below are links to the WKRG (CBS, Mobile) and WSFA (NBC, Montgomery)

"Watershed" web sites. ADEM plans to replicate the project in the Birmingham and Huntsville

markets in 2005.

This project is currently being funded by ADEM, but it is anticipated that the responsibility of recruiting sponsors/funding will transfer to the ACWP statewide and basin groups after the second year of each project. It's a great educational and public relations opportunity and there is sure to be much interest!

Watershed photos and events for the Calendar of Events section of the sites are needed to keep them new and updated. Also, if you know of any newsworthy events coming to your watersheds, contact me and I will notify the stations. The television stations want opportunities to film watershed events to broadcast and for interesting stories to highlight on the websites. Contact info: Statewide ACWP

Coordinator Allison Newell Jenkins, phone: 334-514-8326, e-mail: allisonnewell2@aol.com, website: <http://www.cleanwaterpartnership.org>.

The websites-Interactive Environment (TM): Watersheds: Where the Atmosphere Meets the Earth:

WKRG Mobile: <http://wkrg.iewatershed.com/>
WSFA Montgomery: <http://wsfa.iewatershed.com/>

Ching Dairy Waste Management System Completed

The final part of the Mobile County Ching Dairy Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) was recently completed. The final part was a system to return the nutrients from a lagoon treatment system to the land for use as a fertilizer.

The waste management system on the Ching property was a joint project of the Juniper Creek Watershed partnership, including the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Mobile Area Water and Sewage System, Mobile County SWCD, The Alabama Department of Environmental Management, Gulf Coast RC&D, and many others. The Ching property drains into Juniper Creek (on the 303(d) list for pathogens) and ends up in Big Creek Lake, the source for Mobile's water supply. This final step will decrease the amount of agricultural runoff from entering the creek.

At a demonstration of the system in November, the odor was almost unnoticeable. This will be a great benefit to the Ching farm since the surrounding area is rapidly becoming urban.

At the Ching Dairy, what was once a liability is now an asset. Research on using geotextile bags to improve lagoon system dewatering is continuing.

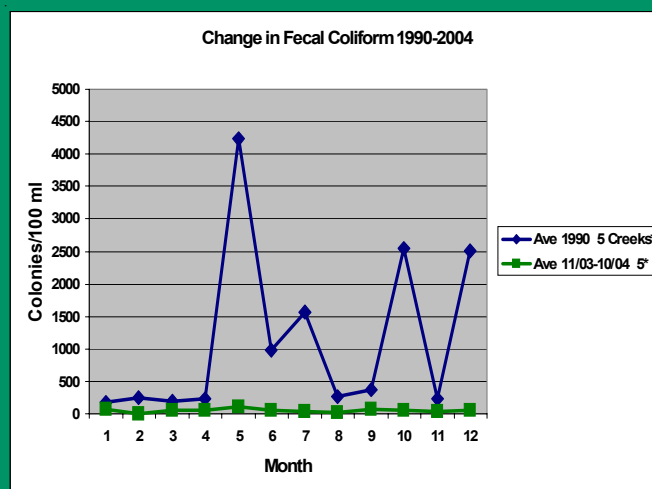


Cleaner Water in Cullman County

Water quality in Cullman County has dramatically improved during the past 10 years. This improvement is the result of efforts by local poultry and cattle farmers working with the Cullman County SWCD and NRCS to improve soil and water conservation in the area.

According to Robert Harbison, Chairman of the Cullman County SWCD Board of Directors, a recent comparison of water quality data taken 14 years apart from five Cullman County creeks shows positive changes in water quality. Primary causes for the high volume of “bad” bacteria in the creeks were cattle, poultry litter, and failed septic systems.

With grants from EPA, ADEM, the State of Alabama, and other sources, Cullman County SWCD/NRCS helped local farmers fence cattle out of creeks by providing alternate water sources such as ponds and troughs. County poultry farmers built dry stack litter storage facilities. This allowed poultry litter to be stored and spread as fertilizer when pasture grasses and crops can use it, thus keeping it from leaching into the water supply.



Area farmers planted vegetative buffer strips along many miles of Cullman County creeks to protect the banks from erosion. In addition, the Public Health Department decreased the number of failed septic systems.

The graph shows that the five creeks sampled in 1990 have averaged only 56 colonies of *E. coli* bacteria over the past twelve months. This is a remarkable reduction in bacterial pollution.

Alabama Earth Team

The Alabama Earth Team (ET) logged in 4,264 volunteers with 80,880 hours in FY 2004. The Alabama ET Award winners are:

Individual Award – Merry Buford/Lee Co

Group Award – Water Festival/Lee Co

NACD/NRCS Award – Vestavia Hills/Jefferson Co

Field Office Award – Vestavia Hills/Jefferson Co

Team Individual Winners –

North – Rashad Easley/Cawaco RC&D

East – Merry Buford/Lee Co

West – Will Brothers, Liz Ellington, Matthew Finley, Leia Price/Hale Co

Lee County Volunteers Recognized

By: Ann Miller, DAC, Opelika, AL

Group Award — The Lee County Water Festival ET group was named the 2004 Alabama Outstanding Group. The volunteers put in 2,362 hours to plan and staff the first annual Lee County Water Festival in May

2004 at Auburn University. All Lee County 4th graders—over 1,560 students and teachers—attended the first “Every Drop Counts” water festival. The festival received \$28,278 in grants and donations that were matched with \$44,892 in-kind donations, volunteer hours, and mileage.

Individual Earth Team Volunteer — Merry Buford is committed to educating young people about the importance of protecting the environment. She joined the Lee County ET in February 2004 while taking soils classes at Auburn University. She assisted with many of the ongoing conservation projects such as: teacher in-service workday, District land judging, poster and essay contests, and the annual Stewardship Meeting and Breakfast. She met with landowners about the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and other practices and programs. In June, Merry became a permanent employee with NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in Covington County.

Farm Bill Program News

CSP Coming To Wheeler Lake Watershed

By: Ben Moore, Agronomist, Luverne, AL

Wheeler Lake Watershed farmers will be the first in Alabama to participate in the Conservation Security Program (CSP). CSP provides financial and



Wheeler Lake Watershed

technical assistance to promote conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant, and animal life, and other conservation purposes on Tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, and

improved pasture, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation.

The program provides equitable access to benefits for all producers, regardless of size of operation, crops produced, or geographic location. CSP rewards the best conservation stewards with financial payments and technical assistance, and encourages others to implement conservation practices on working agricultural lands. Alabama counties within this watershed include Cullman, Jackson, Madison, Marshall, Morgan, Lawrence, Lauderdale, and Limestone. Tennessee counties include Franklin, Giles, Lawrence, and Lincoln. Sign-up will begin very soon.

NRCS Signs WRP Contract with the Nature Conservancy

By: Jeff Thurmond, Wildlife Biologist, Auburn, AL

NRCS joined The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to restore and protect a portion of land along the Paint Rock River in Jackson County. TNC placed 280 acres of land in the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) to return the canalized stream to its original, meandering course, plant bottomland hardwood, and

plug ditches to restore the stream to its natural environment. This acreage will be used to demonstrate what can be done to protect land and streams. This is a great example of how agencies, with a common goal, can work together.

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program

Paul Kennedy, Cawaco RC&D Coordinator; joined personnel from the Regional Planning Commission of Greater Birmingham and the University of Alabama Center for Economic Development to inform major landowners in Chilton County about the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program, the changing economy, and the need for growth planning and preparation. The session was convened by the Chilton County Industrial Development Board Executive Director Joy Littleton, and Jim Pitts, Station Director for the Auburn University/ACES Chilton County Horticultural Sub Station.

Small Watershed Program Project

By Jeff Holloway, Resource Engineer, Oxford, AL

The Small Watershed Program (PL-566) was amended to provide cost-share funds to help rehabilitate aging watershed dams. The Anniston Water Works and Sewer Board and other sponsors have formally requested assistance to rehabilitate Choccolocco Creek Site 11. NRCS is in the process of approving the project plan and design for FY05.

NRCS pays 65 percent of the project costs to extend the life of qualified structures to a minimum of 50 years. Local sponsors will obtain the remaining 35 percent of the costs through cash contributions or "in kind" services.



Conservation Education

Promoting Conservation Education

By Kathy Walker, DAC, Huntsville, AL

Conservation education is a priority with many district administrative coordinators (DACs). ADEM was aware of the teacher workshops that I had conducted in the Huntsville area for the past six years. They wanted other DACs to see how the workshop was planned, conducted, funded, and promoted. Using ADEM funds earmarked for conservation education, a training session was held in Selma.

The training was a cooperative effort with resources provided by Patti Hurley and Carmen Yelle of ADEM; Vic Payne and Steve Cauthen with AACD; and Dr. Doug Phillips of Discovering Alabama. I planned, coordinated, and taught portions of the workshop and provided hands-on projects; Bill Prince of NRCS taught a soils unit; Dr. Phillips taught Discovering Alabama; Vic Payne taught protection of our watersheds; and Carmen Yelle took us on a tour of Old Cahaba and the Cahaba watershed.

When Dr. Phillips, one of the major sponsors of the workshops, was asked about his commitment to conservation education coordinated by DACs, he said, "Discovering Alabama's major priority is reaching schools, citizens, and communities in Alabama. This

system of networking in teacher workshops is one of the best avenues to get our message across. We are happy to continue to sponsor the workshops and will work with DACs in their county to promote workshops as well."

The DACs came to the workshop to get enough information for a one-day workshop. They left saying "I can't plan less than a two-day workshop, and I really need three days."



Kathy Walker, DAC in Huntsville, teaches the importance of clean water in workshop.

Conservation Education in Cullman County

By: Sammy Harris, District Specialist, Cullman, AL

Cullman County is proud of its conservation achievements this year. Our efforts resulted in numerous area and state awards:

- Four poster contest winners
- Jr. and Sr. categories of the essay contest
- Elementary Teacher of the Year
- Outstanding Conservation Business of the Year
- Outstanding District Employee
- Conservation Education District of the Year
- Outstanding Elected Official
- AACD Distinguished Service Award.

In addition to these awards, Cullman County's Amanda Johnson received the State District Employees Association Scholarship, and the Cullman SWCD's assistant district administrative coordinator Deborah Widner was awarded the State District Employees Association's Distinguished Service Award.



A tour of Old Cahaba and the Cahaba watershed was enjoyed by the group.

Civil Rights Advisory Committee

Hispanic Heritage Month

By: Carolyn King, Hispanic SEPM

In celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct. 15) the Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) held their quarterly meeting in September at the Chamber of Commerce in Bay Minette, which is a restored train depot and full of local history.

Following the meeting, Carolyn King, Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Manager (SEPM); Joyce Nicholas, East Team CRAC member; and Baldwin County SWCD/ NRCS personnel hosted a luncheon for the committee and special guests in appreciation for their hard work and support the past year.

Appetizers included Carne Asada, Chili Rellenos, and chips and dip. The entrée was stuffed Sopapillas with Sweet Rice and Ice Cream Sundaes for dessert. Recipes for most dishes are available at ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/AL/pdf/sepm/hisp_recipes.pdf.



The guests enjoyed the meal and the door prizes. Everyone got a bound copy of recipes.



Baldwin County Soil Conservationist James Hinote set the mood for the festivities by greeting members and guests in his poncho and sombrero.

November was American Indian Heritage Month

By David Elliott, American Indian/Alaskan Native SEPM

To celebrate American Indian Heritage Month in November, nationally designed posters were sent to all the Tribes and NRCS offices in the state. I also distributed a list of interesting web sites and other information that I hope was helpful.

Alabama has nine American Indian Tribes located throughout the State (see the map). All Tribes are State recognized, but the Poarch Band of Creek Indians is the only Federally recognized Tribe.

As Tribal Liaison for the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, I staff an NRCS Tribal office on the Reservation that is open on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Andrew Williams, NRCS Outreach Liaison, works with all the State recognized Tribes as well as the local NRCS staff in each of the counties where the Tribes are located.

I would like to compliment all the work that has been done across our State and the efforts of NRCS staff in providing technical assistance to the Tribes as well as individual Tribal members.

After visiting our website this past year, we had eight people to contact us for help in finding information about their American Indian heritage. We referred them to the people that can assist them in their search.

As American Indian/Alaska Native SEPM, if I can help in any way, please contact me: e-mail: david.elliott@al.usda.gov; phone: 251-867-3185.



Alabama NRCS Employee Selected for the National Civil Rights Committee

By: Alice Love, Alabama NRCS Farm Bill Specialist, Auburn, AL

In July 2004, I was selected to serve on the National Civil Rights Committee (NCRC) as the Female Disability Representative. I attended my first meeting in December.

During my 3-year term, I will assist the NCRC Chair Rosendo Trevino III who makes recommendations to NRCS Chief Bruce Knight on issues relating to the agency's Civil Rights Policy. As a member of this committee, I will function in the following categories:

- 1) Serve as a member of an advisory body to the NRCS Chief to promote and assist in meaningful and effective affirmation action consistent with the goals and objectives set forth by management.

- 2) Provide feedback on agency performance in equal employment opportunity and civil rights compliance, identify areas of weakness, and make recommendations for improvement.

- 3) Identify emerging areas needing special attention by the Chief and NRCS top management.

- 4) Make recommendations to the Chief regarding policies, practices, and procedures as they affect equal opportunity agency-wide.

As opportunities occur, I encourage fellow co-workers to apply for membership on the National Civil



Rights Committee. Vacancies scheduled for 2005 are: Native American Male, Black Female, and Asian Pacific Island Male. These vacancies will be announced nation-wide later this year by the State Administrative Officer. If you have questions pertaining to the application process or roles and responsibilities of a committee member, I will be happy to meet with you (e-mail:

alice.love@al.usda.gov, phone: 334-887-4550). Visit the national website at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/civilrights/> to learn more about the NCRC Bylaws, members, and individual state Civil Rights Committees.

New Alabama Committee Member

Jason Gardner, DC in Opelika, was one of the two North Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) members when he transferred to the East Team. When a new East Team representative was needed this year, it was decided that Jason would become the East Team representative and a new member would be selected from the North Team. The State Conservationist selected Thomas McDaniel, District Conservationist in Columbiana, to be the new North Team committee member.

The CRAC is open to input from every employee in the state. To voice a concern or submit a suggestion a form is available on the Alabama NRCS website under Civil Rights Advisory Committee (ftp://ftp-fc.sc.egov.usda.gov/AL/info/CRACconcern-sugg_form.pdf). Fill out the form and forward it to any CRAC committee member.

NRCS Staff Assists With Regional Soil Contest at AU

NRCS employees Lawrence McGhee, Greg Brannon, Doug Clendenon, and George Martin served as judges for the SE Regional Soil Judging Contest hosted by Dr. Joey Shaw, Associate Professor and other Auburn University staff in October. Professional Soil Classifiers Association of Alabama (PSCAA) members also participated and helped sponsor a banquet for the contestants and coaches.

Twelve universities participated in the contest. The North Carolina State team took first place honors, followed closely by Virginia Tech, the University of Georgia, Tennessee Tech, and the University of Kentucky. These top five teams are eligible to participate in the National Contest, which will also be hosted by Auburn University in April 2005. We want to

express a special thanks to Dr. Joey Shaw and his staff for a very well run and successful event.



North Carolina State Team takes 1st Place.

PERSONNEL

Accession

Donald Nelson, Soil Conservationist, Jackson, AL

Promotions

Thomas McDaniel, Soil Conservationist, Gadsden, AL to District Conservationist, Columbiana, AL

Reassignments

Jamie Carpenter, Soil Conservationist, Moulton, AL to Athens, AL

Scott Guinn, Soil Conservationist, Troy, AL to Moulton, AL

Joyce Lane, Soil Conservationist, Athens, AL to Huntsville, AL

Transfers Out

Rusty Bull, Soil Conservation Technician, Hamilton, AL to Civil Engineering Technician, USDA Forest Service, Double Springs, AL

Retirements

Jimmy Chaffin, Assistant State Conservationist, Auburn, AL

Russell Harper, District Conservationist, Florence, AL
Kenneth Johnson, Resource Soil Scientist, Grove Hill, AL

Robert Maltbie, Soil Conservation Technician, Guntersville, AL

Margaret Vandiver, Soil Conservation Technician, Jasper, AL

David Waller, Cartographic Technician, Auburn, AL

After IT Convergence, the Auburn Information Technology (IT) personnel were transferred to the Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) ITS Organization (no change in geographic location)

Susan Dillard, Supervisory Information Technology Specialist, Auburn, AL to OCIO

Kim Yates, Information Technology Specialist, Auburn, AL to OCIO

Applications Sought For Farm Of Distinction

The Alabama Farm-City Committee is seeking applications for Alabama's 2005 Farm of Distinction competition, which recognizes outstanding farmers and rewards them with cash and other prizes.

Based on the applications submitted, division winners will be chosen from five areas of the state, plus one at-large winner. These six farms will then compete for the state title and a \$2,500 cash prize.

The application for the 2005 Farm of Distinction is on the Alfa Farmers website: www.alfafarmers.org/farm-city. For more information, call 1-800-392-5705, ext. 4410 or email: ptill@alfafarmers.org. The deadline for applications is Feb. 15.

Division winners will be judged by a panel of agricultural experts who will visit each farm. The winner will be announced during a ceremony April 25 in Birmingham. Alabama's winner will represent the state in competition for the Lancaster/Sunbelt Expo Southeastern Farmer of the Year that will be named during the Sunbelt Ag Expo October 18-20 in Moultrie, GA. The Sunbelt winner will receive \$14,000 plus other prizes.

"Alabama is blessed with some of the best farms in the country. We are calling on Alabama Farmers Federation members to help us identify those operations that are the crown jewels of Alabama agriculture," said J. Paul Till, Chairman of the Alabama Farm-City Committee. "This is an excellent way to recognize operations that showcase the qualities that make Alabama agriculture great: hard work, conservation, good management and innovative thinking."

Farms will be judged on environmental stewardship, overall appearance, accomplishments, efficiency, and leadership of the farm owner. Any size farm is eligible for the competition.

Last year's Farm of Distinction winners were John Bert and Dawn East of Cherokee County.

The Farm of Distinction Award is presented annually by the Farm-City Committee of Alabama. Farm-City Week is observed nationally each year the week before Thanksgiving as a way to help bridge the gap between rural and urban residents.

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